Department for Work & Pensions

Minutes

Title of meeting: DWP (Department for Work and Pensions) Serious Case Panel

Date: 6 May 2026

Location: Virtual

Attendees: David Bennett, Non-Executive Director (Chair), Peter Schofield, Permanent Secretary, Neil Couling, Director General, DWP Services and Fraud Group, Barbara Bennett, Chief Executive and Director General, Jobs and Careers Service, Sarah Homer, Director General for Corporate Transformation, Helen Wylie, Director General Digital and Transformation and Chief Digital and Information Officer, Sophie Dean, Director General, Welfare and Pensions (also obo Katherine Green), Joanna Wallace, Independent Case Examiner, Dr Gail Allsopp, Chief Medical Advisor, Helga Swidenbank, Director Accessibility, Disability and Disputes, Clare Talbot, Deputy Director Customer Accessibility Standards and Assurance, Accessibility, Disability and Disputes, Robert Currens, Deputy Director Advanced Customer Support and Emily Shaw, Deputy Director Legal Group (obo John Ward).

Presenters: Redacted, Advanced Customer Support, Redacted, Advanced Customer Support, Jeremy Edwards and Redacted, Digital Group.

Apologies: Catherine Vaughan, Director General for Finance, Katherine Green, Director General, Labour Market and Skills, John Ward, Legal Director, Julie Blomley, Director General for People and Capability

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed attendees, thanking Barbara Bennett for her contribution to the Serious Case Panel in recent years.

2. Emerging Issues

Robert Currens updated the Panel on a Freedom of Information disclosure relating to a 2022 discussion on *Keeping Customer Promises*, covering address changes and telephone call backs.

Robert also updated the Panel on Advanced Customer Support content for the Department's 2025 - 2026 Annual Report and Accounts, due for publication later this year.
As in previous years, the report will include details on the Visiting Service, Advanced Customer Support Senior Leaders, and Internal Process Reviews (IPR). The Serious Case Panel content will outline the strengthened terms of reference and activities presented to the Panel.
Robert confirmed that the publication of IPR information for the 2023/2024 operational year is nearing completion and expected to be published later this year.
Robert advised that work is ongoing in response to the Minister for Social Security and Disability's request to consider sharing IPR information with customers' families. Options and advice will be submitted to Ministers.

3. Progress on Serious Case Panel sponsored activity

Redacted provided an update on improvement activities sponsored by the Panel.

Redacted updated on the 'Making Large Payments' initiative. A learning product delivered between November 2025 and April 2026 reached around 11,000 colleagues. Assurance activity confirmed successful implementation. A review of guidance and processes is ongoing; with call scripts being revised to improve question phrasing and the quality of conversations with customers.
Jeremy Edwards confirmed that all service lines will have implemented comprehensive call transcription by year end, fulfilling a previous Panel direction.

4. Safeguarding Approach

Dr. Gail Allsopp, Clare Talbot, and Redacted provided an update on safeguarding following the written Ministerial Statement published in December 2025.
The update covered both the clinical progress, including the strengthening of the Internal Process Reviews to align clinical reviews with the operational IPR process and an update on all the year 1 activity that was committed to in the Statement.
Work is underway to clarify the operational model, define safeguarding and introduce processes, training, and review mechanisms to support colleagues in identifying safeguarding needs.

The Department is developing a strengthened safeguarding framework with publication planned by year end. Consultation with external organisations continues as part of this work.

5. Appointees – Add an Appointee

Redacted updated on the digital 'add an appointee' service, which aims to reduce duplicate referrals and introduce automated review dates.

The service is currently in testing and enables colleagues to record prospective appointees for department-wide visibility. It will support development of an end-to-end digital appointee process. The Panel supported the continuation of the discovery work.

6. Real Time Customer Alerts

Jeremy Edwards and Redacted presented an overview of Real Time Customer Alerts (RTCA), part of the Contact Centre Modernisation Programme to improve support for vulnerable customers during calls.

RTCA identifies potential vulnerability through language, context, and sentiment, prompting agents with guidance, and escalation options, including for situations where customers have intimated suicide or self-harm.

It aims to improve consistency of responses by supporting colleagues to recognise and respond to vulnerability signals in real time.

The Panel provided feedback and agreed a phased rollout, with implementation to be informed by ongoing evaluation.

7. AOB and Close

David Bennett and members of the Serious Case Panel thanked the presenters and their teams for their updates.

Next meeting: 23 September 2026